

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6103
DAVID LENT/ROME

AUGUST 24, 1978

ON THE EVE OF THE CONCLAVE

ANNCR:

ONE HUNDRED ELEVEN CARDINALS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ARE PREPARING TO ENTER INTO CONCLAVE FRIDAY TO CHOOSE A POPE WHO IS LIKELY TO LEAD THE CHURCH AND ITS SEVEN HUNDRED MILLION FOLLOWERS INTO THE NINETEEN EIGHTIES.-- PERHAPS BEYOND. FROM VATICAN CITY, DAVID LENT HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

TEXT:

THE CARDINALS ARE ENTERING THE CONCLAVE WITH NO CLEAR FAVORITE TO SUCCEED POPE PAUL, WHO DIED ON AUGUST SIXTH. STILL, PREDICTIONS HERE ARE THAT THE CONCLAVE WILL BE A RELATIVELY SHORT AFFAIR, LASTING PERHAPS NO MORE THAN THREE OR FOUR DAYS. THE CARDINAL ELECTORS WILL CELEBRATE A MASS ON FRIDAY MORNING THAT WILL CENTER AROUND THE PRAYERS FOR GUIDANCE IN THE SELECTION OF THE NEXT POPE. -- THE TWO-HUNDRED-AND-SIXTY-THIRD SUCCESSOR TO SAINT PETER. THEN, AT FOUR THIRTY IN THE AFTERNOON, ROME TIME, TO THE CHANTING OF "VENI CREATOR" -- COME HOLY SPIRIT -- THEY WILL FILE INTO THE FRESCOED SISTINE CHAPEL AND BE SEALED AWAY FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

VOTING STARTS SATURDAY MORNING. UNDER THE RULES, THE CARDINALS MAY CAST TWO BALLOTS AT EACH MORNING AND AFTERNOON VOTING SESSION. BUT THERE IS SOME DOUBT THAT HISTORY'S LARGEST COLLEGE OF CARDINAL ELECTORS CAN ACCOMPLISH THAT MANY BALLOTS A DAY. WHEN TWO-THIRDS PLUS ONE VOTES HAVE BEEN CAST FOR A CANDIDATE, NAMING HIM POPE -- OR AT THE END OF EACH VOTING SESSION -- THE BALLOTS WILL BE BURNT IN A METAL STOVE, IF THE BALLOTS HAVE BEEN U-N-S-U-C-C-F-S-S-F-U-L, CHEMICALS WILL BE ADDED TO PRODUCE BLACK SMOKE. WHITE SMOKE INDICATES A POPE HAS

BEEN ELECTED AND WILL BE PRESENTED SHORTLY ON THE BALCONY OF SAINT PETER'S BASILICA.

BECAUSE NO FAVORITE HAS EMERGED, THE EXPECTATION IS THAT THE FIRST SMOKE TO EMERGE FROM THE STACK ON IN THE SISTINE CHAPEL ROOF WILL BE BLACK. A NUMBER OF CARDINALS ARE BEING MENTIONED AS POSSIBLE CHOICES. AMONG THE ITALIANS ARE BAGGIO, PIGNEDOLI, AND BERTOLI. CARDINAL BERTOLI'S SUPPORTERS WERE REPORTED ON THURSDAY TO BE WAGING A VIGOROUS CAMPAIGN ON HIS BEHALF, DEPENDING IN PART UPON HIS POPULARITY WITH THIRD-WORLD CARDINALS FOLLOWING HIS KEY ROLE IN PROMOTING EPISCOPAL ACTIVITIES IN LATIN AMERICA. THE NON-ITALIAN CARDINALS MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED ARE PIRONIO OF ARGENTINA, WILLEBRANDTS OF THE NETHERLANDS, AND PAUL'S VATICAN SECRETARY OF STATE CARDINAL, JEAN VILLOT OF FRANCE.

A TOUR OF THE CONCLAVE AREA GRANTED NEWSMEN REVEALED THAT THE ONE HUNDRED ELEVEN CARDINALS WILL BE LIVING A RATHER AUSTERE EXISTENCE. WHITE, HOSPITAL-TYPE BEDS WITHOUT SPRINGS AND ONLY THIN MATTRESSES HAVE BEEN PROVIDED. WINDOWS IN THE CONCLAVE AREA HAVE BEEN PAINTED OVER AND SEALED. THERE IS NO AIR CONDITIONING. NEWSMEN FOUND THE ATMOSPHERE CONSTRUCTING AND DARK. LIVING CONDITIONS MAY HASTEN A DECISION. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE CARDINALS HAVE HAD NINETEEN DAYS IN WHICH TO CONFER AMONG THEMSELVES INFORMALLY; AND ALTHOUGH NO FAVORITE HAS EMERGED, MUCH OF THE PRELIMINARY THINKING ABOUT WHO SHOULD BECOME THE NEXT POPE MAY HAVE ALREADY TAKEN PLACE.

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WJL/RD